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U.S. PLANS TO AID MOZAMBIQUE ARMY

Would Give \$1 Million Worth
of 'Nonlethal' Military Gear
Because of Better Ties

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WASHINGTON, Jan. 16 — State Department officials said today that the Reagan Administration would try to open a "limited military assistance relationship" with the Marxist Government of Mozambique as a result of recent changes in that southeast African nation's attitude toward the United States.

The officials, who attributed the changes to economic and military pressure on the Mozambique Government, said the Administration notified Congress several weeks ago that it wanted to give Mozambique's armed forces \$1 million in "nonlethal" military equipment, such as uniforms, vehicles and communications equipment. In addition, \$150,000 would be spent to train Mozambican military personnel, some of them in the United States.

Congressional aides said the plan probably would be approved in Congress since both liberals and conservatives were likely to see it as a way to begin weaning Mozambique away from Soviet influence. Since it gained independence from Portugal a decade ago, Mozambique has relied mainly on the Soviet Union for military and economic aid, and it was highly critical of the United States and other non-Communist nations.

Over the last several years, however, the criticism has moderated somewhat and Mozambique has made several moves toward accommodation. It has tried to strengthen relations with Western European nations, has accepted some American economic aid, has received some high American officials and has sought a peaceful solution to its differences with the white-minority Government of South Africa.

No Basic Change Seen

State Department officials say they are under no illusions that the accommodation grew out of a fundamental change in the nature of Mozambique's Government. It remains basically Marxist, they say, and many Soviet advisers remain in Mozambique.

Rather, they continue, it appears that Soviet aid has been insufficient to overcome the combined effects of drought, famine, economic problems and guerrilla insurrection.

United States relations with Mozambique reached a low point in 1981 when the Government expelled four American diplomats, charging that they were agents of the Central Intelligence Agency. For the next couple of years, ties were tenuous, with only American food aid flowing to Mozambique.

The State Department announcement today said: "We have seen a major improvement in our bilateral relations with Mozambique over the last two years. The Administration has therefore decided to seek to develop a limited military assistance relationship with Mozambique. The funds would go for nonlethal equipment and would be part of an effort to help professionalize the Mozambique armed forces."

Those forces are fending off guerrillas who, until recently, were openly supported by neighboring South Africa. Under an agreement that Mozambique worked out with South Africa last year, that support was to stop, as was Mozambique's support for South African guerrillas. But insurgents continue to operate in both countries.

State Department officials said the aid would not involve a request to Congress for new funds. Rather, they said, the department would prefer to shift funds already appropriated.